Downtown Boone Development Association
February Budget Retreat – February 11, 2025
8:30 am – The Watauga County Public Library

Board Members Present: In-Person: Renee Boughman, Suzanne Livesay and Kendra Sink. Virtually: Fulton Lovin, Stephanie Boozer, Sarah Long, Megan Kevorkian, Mike Forrester

Ex-Officio's Present: Eric Plaag

Town Staff Present: Lane Moody

Call to Order
At 9:06 Kendra called the meeting to order.

Request for Approval of Budget Retreat Agenda
Lane asked if the agenda could be amended to include a discussion about a possible celebration for longtime downtown postal worker Robin Hodges, following the discussion of the High Country Jazz Fest. Renee moved to approve the amended agenda, Suzanne seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Discussion of Postponement of Jon Schallert Advanced Workshop
Kendra opened by expressing her excitement about the rescheduled date. Lane followed by informing the Board that the new date coincided with the regular DBDA March Board meeting. She asked whether the Board would prefer to move the meeting up by a week or cancel it and incorporate relevant discussions into the February Board meeting agenda. After a brief discussion, Stephanie made a motion to reschedule the March Board meeting to March 18. Mike seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Request for Approval of High Country Jazz Fest Sponsorship
Lane opened the discussion by noting that she had included the sponsorship request from Jon Cooper for High Country Jazz Festival, which was discussed at the last meeting. She mentioned that she believed the request was for $2,500, but Renee pointed out that she did not see a specific amount in the proposal. The Board took a moment to review the different sponsorship levels, and after a brief discussion, Renee suggested that the $5,000 level would be a good choice. Eric expressed concern about a potential conflict regarding the tickets included in the sponsorship package. Kendra proposed that instead of Board members keeping the tickets, they could be given away as a part of a social media promotional campaign. Renee then motioned to sponsor the High Country Jazz Fest at the Ella Fitzgerald sponsorship level of $5,000. Fulton seconded the motion. Suzanne abstained from voting, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Discussion of Acknowledging the Retirement of Longtime Downtown Postal Worker Robin Hodges
Lane opened by informing the Board that Bill Dixon had reached out to her regarding Robin Hodges, who has worked at the downtown post office for 30 years and will be retiring at the end of the month. He inquired whether the DBDA would be interested in celebrating her retirement.
Lane added that she recently learned Robin would be undergoing surgery and was unsure if she would return to the office before retiring. However, Lane planned to explore whether Robin would be open to a reception and having a plaque made in her honor. Kendra then made a motion to allocate up to $200 for a plaque and refreshments for a reception honoring Robin Hodges. Fulton seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Updates for NC Main Street Strategic Work Plan

Lane opened by asking the Board if three action items in the strategic plan could be revisited.

She first addressed the item related to attending the International Town and Gown Association Meeting. She noted that the cost was prohibitive and suggested a more effective action could be to establish a way to connect with incoming freshmen to provide them with information about downtown. She mentioned briefly discussing this idea with university staff last year. Suzanne supported this change, mentioning her own efforts to do something similar for the Theatre and sharing her thoughts. The Board agreed with the proposed language change.

Lane’s second proposed revision concerned the item about meeting with ASU staff for an update on Board of Trustees meetings. She explained that this suggestion was made before administrative changes at the university and that, instead of relying on staff for updates, it might be more efficient for DBDA representatives to attend Board of Trustees meetings directly. The Board was supportive of this adjustment.

For her final action item, Lane proposed exploring a culinary week instead of organizing a full-scale festival. She noted that Sheri Moretz had shared examples of similar events in other communities, including Roanoke, VA; Winston-Salem, NC; and Greenville, NC. Kendra added that the Mast General Manager in Greenville had spoken highly of their event’s success. She also inquired whether the TDA could help with advertising. Megan asked about the possibility of incorporating a fall festival, which led to a brief discussion. From that conversation, the Board considered the best timing for a culinary week, ultimately deciding on either May 12-16 or May 19-23, aiming for a shoulder season. Lane stated that she would research the culinary weeks previously discussed and reach out to downtown restaurants to gauge interest. The Board expressed its support for this change.

Review Economic Vitality Actions

Lane opened by stating that, while working on the Main Street Assessment, she realized the need to be more intentional with committee work. She suggested that the Economic Vitality Committee meet every other month, proposing April for the next meeting. Lane then outlined what she believed should be top priorities for the list. First, she recommended reviewing existing incentive programs to identify opportunities for expanded language that could provide additional support to businesses directly impacted by the Howard Street project. The Board discussed this for a few minutes and also noted the importance of expanding marketing efforts related to these changes. Additionally, Lane emphasized the need to prioritize the development of the passport program, particularly focusing on businesses along Howard Street, as well as working with the TDA to get some downtown Boone swag in the new visitor center. The Board expressed support for all of these priorities.

Review Design Actions

Lane opened by noting that the Design Committee would need to meet more frequently than the Economic Vitality group and suggested holding monthly meetings, possibly in conjunction with the Promotions Committee. She then proposed that the Design Committee’s priorities should focus on refreshing the public art program, a discussion that had already begun at the last meeting. She mentioned that conversations about the space next to Melanie’s were already underway and expressed her intention to reach out to the owners of 681 W. King Street regarding potential work in the alleyway. Lane concluded by stating that she needed to begin work on the points of interest project and would need to get a measurement wheel to start the process. With no questions the Board moved on.

Review Promotion Actions

Lane opened by noting that she had already been working on collateral materials after finding a strong example in Hendersonville's New Business Information Packet. She added that she would continue exploring the proposed Restaurant Week concept.

A brief discussion followed about how to clearly present the permitting process. Lane stated that she would reach out to Planning and Inspections for their input.

Renee inquired about the eight storytelling pieces. Lane invited anyone interested in writing one of these pieces to reach out to her. She also mentioned that it was her understanding that NC Main Street would assist with some story-writing sessions as part of the Destination Development training. When Renee asked about the expected length of the pieces, Lane said she was unsure, and Suzanne suggested they would likely be around 600 words or article-length.

The discussion then shifted to the opportunity to use these storytelling pieces to highlight the unique history of downtown buildings, support the historic walking tour, and serve other promotional purposes. Suzanne noted that the Appalachian Theatre has a robust media list and offered to distribute these stories.

Eric provided an update on the Stoneman's Raid Marker, and Kendra expressed her appreciation for the walking trails app. The discussion concluded with Renee volunteering to write the first piece about the F.A.R.M. Café location.

Review of Organizational Actions

Lane opened by emphasizing that one of the organization's most important tasks would be developing a communication plan for the Howard Street Revitalization Project. Kendra and Lane reviewed advice received during a recent meeting with Downtown Concord.

Eric expressed serious concerns about funding for the Howard Street project due to recent changes in the current administration. The Board briefly discussed modifications to federal funding and their potential local implications. The conversation then shifted to the importance of continuing collaborative trainings and inviting businesses from outside the downtown area to participate.

Eric inquired about efforts to secure a seat at the TDA. Lane noted that she has a good working relationship with the TDA but has been unable to attend their meetings due to scheduling conflicts. Eric suggested that if the Board wished to have a formal role on the TDA Board, it would be appropriate to bring the request to Town Council.

After a brief discussion on downtown representation, Lane stated that she would follow up with Sheri Moretz for input. With no further discussion, the Board moved on.

Budget Retreat

Lane opened by stating that she would be discussing both the current year and potential recommendations. She reviewed each budget line, highlighting that none were overspent and suggesting that many could remain the same for the 2025-2026 budget.

Lane apologized for not mentioning it earlier in the meeting but was pleased to report that Boone would likely host the NC Main Street Directors' meeting in August. She added that she was working with university staff to finalize the details.

Concluding the discussion, Lane noted that, based on the earlier conversation, she would work to strengthen the Community Appearance line to support additional grant funding. Other than those adjustments, she planned to keep the budget largely unchanged and would present a final version for approval at the February meeting.

The Board briefly discussed brownfield property taxes in downtown, received an update on the remaining sidewalk work, and considered the possibility of installing a digital sign in the space next to Melanie's.

Suzanne requested that committee meetings be scheduled at least two weeks in advance whenever possible. Lane stated that she would bring back updates to the work plans along with the proposed budget, incorporating the discussed changes, at the next meeting.

Call for Adjournment

With no other items to discuss Renee made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Suzanne and had a unanimous vote.